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THE
HIGHLAND GLEN.

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Maria C Moore

Cardiff

1847-

THE HIGHLAND GLEN.

**THE PROFITS WILL BE GIVEN FOR THE BENEFIT OF
THE SUFFERING HIGHLANDERS.**

THE
HIGHLAND GLEN;

OR,
PLENTY AND FAMINE.

BY
MATILDA WRENCH.

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THE HIGHLAND GLEN.

READER, have you ever visited the western Highlands of Argyleshire? If you have, you will doubtless retain many a pleasant memory of the wild glens and the fair lakes, and the picturesque and magnificent mountains that make up the lovely scenery of these regions of the beautiful. If you have not, trust yourself for a few brief minutes to our guidance, while we strive to recal the impressions of one day, out of many happy days, passed in a Highland village there, not very long ago.

The traveller who visits this spot, seldom leaves it without exploring the upper shores and the Serpent's Fall, at the head of Loch —, nor did I and my companion; and, as we were slowly rowed up it against the tide, we gazed in admiration at the pyramidal and craggy mountains that towered majestically above the deep blue waters of the lake, shelving into them, and jutting out in little promontories that almost met on either side, damming up the current so as to make it discharge itself with tenfold impetuosity as it escaped from the narrowed channel. One of our guides was a student of St. Andrew's, the son of one of the smaller tenantry on the Lochiel estates, and, during the vacation, he

was endeavouring, by rowing visitors about the lake, to raise a small sum of money for the purchase of books to enable him to pursue his studies on his return to college. He was a fine athletic-looking lad, with a countenance of remarkable intelligence, and was perfectly well versed in all the legends of the locality. Indeed, his older and more staid fellow-labourer at the oar now and then allowed a half incredulous smile to steal over his weather-beaten face, as Mr. —— related how the shepherd of the glen, in ages past, had, after many warnings, been changed into a mountain on the Inverness side (where, alas! he was wont to stray), and how his faithful wife, who had many a time

strained her eyes in vain in watching for his return, was rewarded for her fidelity and devotion, by finding herself and the stone, on which she used to sit in the dim twilight, gradually growing into the shapely mountain that still bears her name,* so that, while the world lasts, she shall never again lose sight of her gude man. It was truly an idle tale, and yet not, perhaps, altogether vain, for it might suggest a thought of sin and sorrow, that pair inseparably united by a decree which none may break. But we must not linger thus, lest minutes turn to hours, and patience be tired before her time.

After many a vigorous stroke,

* Caillian, the gude wife.

and many a long pull, that caused the beads of dew to stand thick upon the brows of our almost-exhausted boatmen, who with all their efforts could scarcely keep their course among the eddies of opposing currents, we at length saw the water of the fall, flowing into the lake, and gazing on it in admiration, like a silver line upon a field of ultramarine, soon after landed.

I will not stop to tell of sketching and climbing, and of boggy swamps that threatened to impede our way to the most desirable points of view. I will only say that we were thoroughly exhausted with fatigue and hunger, when, after some hours spent in exploring, we turned our steps towards a "house of refresh-

ment" which our boatmen had pointed out. They had promised to announce our approach, and accordingly we found the table spread with freshly-made oat-cake, still hot and crisp, a large bowl of rich cream, fresh butter, a bottle of whisky, and a drinking-horn.

The "house of refreshment" was, however, nothing more than a rough Highland hut, situated at the foot of the old road up the glen, if road that could be called which was formed of a succession of vast ledges of rock from three to five feet high; such as it is, it is the only opening among the mountains that, bare and rugged, rise abruptly on all sides, and it is bordered by a narrow track, down which the drovers still con-

duct their flocks and herds, unless when it is flooded by the mountain torrents, that rush thundering through the glen, and discharge themselves through a chasm in the rock to the left of the hut, forming one of the small streams that feed the lake. A huge, shapeless mass of rock rises just opposite this rustic shelter, and must serve to break the violence of the blasts that sweep the glen, though it also hides the romantic beauties of its entrance.

A little group of three or four children were clambering over the rocks, and dragging huge branches of the bracken, which they had been out to get, as litter for the favourite cow that stood in a byre or shed at one end of the hut. At the sound

of their ringing laughter as they drew near, a rough, wiry-headed tabby cat, that had been basking in the sun, put up her back, and after leisurely stretching herself and pawing, walked to meet the merry ones, and purred and rubbed herself against each in turn, turning up her green eyes as if she expected a caress in answer to her greeting. The bracken was dragged to the cowshed, and then with a yell of self-gratulation, or of hunger, we cannot precisely say which, the whole number rushed into the room we occupied, and as suddenly disappeared through a side door.

• Our meal despatched, and neither waiter nor hostess appearing, we had leisure to survey the apartment.

The centre was supported on what was literally a roof *tree*, for a venerable beech, that had, perhaps, been the original attraction to the site, still upheld the simple framework of the roof, raised aloft on its double-twisted stem, selected, doubtless, for its promise of double strength. In one corner of the room stood a solid oaken chest, the receptacle of the meal that supplied the family with food; opposite was a bed, or rather shake-down, for it was on the floor, but looked very clean and comfortable; on the third side the peat was giving out its red heat from a spacious hearth, and indeed induced such a feeling of suffocation, that we would fain have opened the window for a little fresh

air from the mountains. The massive frame-work, however, was not made to open; it seemed calculated rather to exclude light as well as air, for the proportion of glass was small indeed; so in despair I went to the side door, and, in opening it, nearly tumbled through, for the earth (there was no flooring) had sunk so much at the threshold as to have left a sort of trench. I recovered myself and stepped over, and there were the four barefooted urchins with their curly heads and their rosy cheeks, the very picture of health and glee, standing round a three-legged stool on which their mother had set a large bowl of smoking potatoes and milk. They were sipping and eating, and just as I

entered the room, the elder boy having fished up a particularly attractive, flowery bit of potato between his finger and thumb, ran to the baby, a fine child of some ten or eleven months old, who was sitting on its mother's knee, and began to cram its tiny mouth with the delicious morsel which broke and crumbled and fell into the infant's lap; the petted baby smiled and laughed, and helped to pick up the crumbs, and put them, not into her own mouth, but her mother's. "That's a braw bairn," exclaimed the mother, "a right Highland lassie, aye to gie the bit and sup afore you tak' it yoursel;" and the child, at the sound of its mother's voice, turned to her, and forgot the potato and nestled in

her bosom, and she bent her head over the bonnie wee thing, and gave it a long fond kiss, as though it had been her first-born. She was seated on a low oaken bench, such as in England is called a settle, and a high screen behind her prevented her seeing our entrance.

We stood for a moment looking on the scene of simple domestic happiness before us, and then introducing ourselves by a few words of greeting to the group around the bowl, we thanked the hostess for our seasonable refreshment, and asked what we should pay. "Oh, naething, just naething," was the reply; "ye're wanderers and far frae hame, and ye're welcome." We remonstrated. She shook her head,

saying, "God has gi'en us plenty, and he bids us use hospitality, and ye winna gainsay his bidding, so just gang in peace," she added, laughing goodhumouredly, "for ye're far frae ——, I guess, and ye'll hae a long pull hame."

It was indeed getting late, and the thought of four hours on the lake in the dark, had a hurrying tendency, so pointing to the Bible and hymn-book on the shelf above the children's bed, we bade her remember us in their evening worship, and, slipping some silver into the children's hands, we took our leave. We had not gone many yards before we met a Highlander with a net at his back, and a basket of fish before

him, and the shout of delight which in another moment burst from the cot, proved him to be, as we had supposed, the father of the group within. Before we had gone far, we heard a sonorous voice raising the evening hymn, and anon the sound of shrill and infant voices mingling with it. We could not stop to listen, but we joined in heart, and as a fresh breeze from the mountain pass brought the sweet sounds once more to our ear, we fervently exclaimed (as again they died away), in the words of their native poet :—

“May He who stills the raven’s clamorous
nest,

And decks the lily fair in flow’ry pride, .

Yet, in the way his wisdom sees the best,
For them and for their little ones provide,
But chiefly in their hearts with *grace divine*
preside."

Such was the condition of a Highland family in the autumn of 1845. And now we are about to reverse the picture; to show our Highland family under other circumstances, and we would entreat the reader to remember that since the joyous and the grievous, the bright days and dark days, are alike of God's appointment, it must be good for us to look upon both,—to look, to meditate, to minister, and it may be, in so doing, to learn a lesson that may be to *our* profit as well as theirs. May God

of his infinite mercy grant it, to the glory of his holy name, through Jesus Christ!

Eighteen months had passed over the Highland cottage, and in their brief course had swept away almost all that it had once contained of the appliances of domestic usefulness and comfort; for the scarcity which had been felt on the partial failure of the potato crop in 1845, had, in consequence of the *general* failure of the following year, advanced through the successive stages of privation and destitution, till it might now truly be said in the simple, but emphatic language of Scripture, that "the famine was sore in the land," for "*their food has been destroyed,*

and means of purchasing other food they have not.”*

It is about the second week in January, 1847, that we would again introduce our friends to the home of the M'Kenzies. An air of desolation now reigned around it,—all was still. There was no hum of children's voices making glad the lonely glen; the fowls that had gathered round the cottage-door were no longer to be seen, the pig-stye was empty,† . the stream was frost-bound.

* Second Statement of the Destitution Committee.

† “In many of the islands the pigs, being left without food, have literally disappeared, and the fowls, no longer fed at home, have wandered, and eagles, ravens, and carrion crows have fallen on them and devoured them.”—Second Report.

The thatch which had been secured by birch twigs linked together in the Highland fashion, and kept down by a great stone suspended from the twisted ends, and dangling in front, was half off. The elder bush that had grown beside the shed was gone, and its hollow branches no longer creaked in the wintry blast, for when labour was scarce, and peat was three times its usual price, any thing that would serve for firing was little likely to be spared. The interior of the cottage offered a sad and striking contrast to the scene of joy and plenty it had presented before.

The table, formerly so hospitably spread for us, was gone ; the meal-chest, the children's bed, the comfortable settle, each in its turn had

been parted with for food; the inner door was open, and there were the bairns, no longer fresh, rosy, full of life and vigour; they had ceased to attend the school; they had ceased to climb the overhanging rocks, and splash and dabble, like so many wild birds, in the stream that foamed beneath the ledge on which the cottage stood. Poor children! they were all lying huddled together on a mattress, with a dirty blanket over it: their old pet the grey cat curled up among the group. They were scarcely covered, for the one scanty, tattered garment which did not reach the knees, showed the deep poverty that had fallen on the parents. They were anxiously waiting for the hour when the little

portion of milk which the wretched half, no, not half-fed cow, still yielded, was to be divided among them. It was now three days since they had tasted any other nourishment, and M'Kenzie and his wife began to think it would be better to sell or kill their cow, than thus to see their little ones pining away beneath the united pangs of cold and hunger. But there had been no fire upon the hearth that day; for the few peats that remained were husbanded to dress the meals that they were daily hoping might, through some providential channel, come to them. And the children awoke at night, crying with cold; and one of them sobbed, and said,—
“ Collie is always warm. Oh! mither,

let me gang sleep wi' Collie; for Robin and Moggie are like the frost to me." The father spoke not! but he went to the shed and led in the poor miserable-looking cow, that staggered from weakness as it stepped over the stones at the door. He brought it to the side of the children's bed, and, when it lay down they stretched themselves upon it, and the gentle creature, that in happier days had been caressed and often wreathed with garlands of the broom and heather by them, turned its head and fixed its large mild eye upon them, as though sensible of their sufferings, and pleased to minister to them, and for some hours suffering was forgotten in sleep.

The following morning word was brought that there was work to be had at——, across the hills, and that, perhaps, M'Kenzie might be able to get some. He sighed heavily, but he nodded assent, and, bidding his wife get the Bible from the shelf, and beckoning to the children to come and stand around him, he read the twenty-third Psalm, and his voice became firm and clear as he said,—“ I shall not want,” for he said it in David's spirit, and he believed it in his heart, and the sense of his failing strength that had clouded his brow, gave place to the assurance of faith, as he read the promise of the Staff that is of power to support the weak. And when he had prayed that in

the might of the promise he might go forth, he lifted the hymn as usual; and it was a hymn of *praise*, so that the passing stranger might still have thought it went up from light and happy hearts. And so, indeed, it did; for how "shall the righteous be made sad, whom I have not made sad? saith the Lord God."

The morning worship over, M'Kenzie started on his long and toilsome walk. The embankment, which was the scene of labour, was full ten miles off, over moor and mountain, but he got there after two hours' hard walking, and applied for employment. He was received, and at the end of the day was paid *one shilling* for his toil; and he went

further ere he turned towards his home, to spend his earnings in meal for his family. It was late ere he reached his cabin, his little ones had cried themselves to sleep. His wife, after watching long for his return, oft turning to her sleeping children in the sickness of hope deferred, and then again straining her eyes to look through the casement for her husband, had seated herself at the foot of the bed with her hands clasped tightly together, the indication of a strong mental effort to repress the feelings of anxious suspicion that were busy at her heart, and thus M'Kenzie found her. He shewed the bag of meal, and told her that he had no doubt of being employed at the embank-

ment while the works were in progress; but as he spoke, his words became tremulous, his hand dropped, and he would have fallen, if his wife had not supported, and half dragged him to the bed. Reader, you have read in books of fancy and fiction, scenes of *imaginary* faintings from *imaginary* sources of emotion and of suffering, and, perhaps, you have wept at them; and for such *imaginary* distresses, your tears were *enough*, nay, all too much. They will *not* suffice here. M'Kenzie had walked ten miles to his labour. He had honestly put forth all his strength to his appointed task, he had made a circuit of six miles to get the oatmeal for his children ere he set out on his homeward path. ALL

this he had done, and *he had not tasted food that day*. His wife succeeded so far in reviving him, that he raised his head and looked around, but he could not speak. She looked for a sup of milk in the earthen jar—their only remaining vessel of any kind,—but it was empty. The poor respited cow gave what she could—a scanty supply, all thin and watery! and unlike the rich abundance she had formerly yielded; still it was precious, and as Margaret saw the colour stealing over her husband's wan face, she was thankful that Collie had been spared. If they could but manage to keep her alive still, but the skin hung in huge wrinkles over the projecting bones, and except the dry and

withered bracken, fodder there was none for her.

To kindle the few smouldering peats that lay upon the hearth, and to prepare a mess of porridge for her husband, was Margaret's next care, but M'Kenzie protested that he was abundantly refreshed already, and that he was too sleepy to wait for the cooking of the porridge. Margaret urged him, but he would not be persuaded, and they closed the day with prayer and reading, and together joined in praising Him who had made good his promise of the morning, and supplied their need,—“I shall not *want*,” and as they lay down on their heather mattress with their little ones, all sense of want was gone, and filled

with the consciousness of their Heavenly Father's presence with them, and of his love towards them; his everlasting love in Christ Jesus, they slept in peace! Reader, what would *they* have had to sustain their fainting spirits if they had been living without God in the world?

But morning came again, and with it the cries of the little ones for bread. The elder children tried to hush them, but they had had nothing except an occasional sip of milk the day before, and their cries were only to be stopped by food. Margaret soon rose and prepared the porridge, asking God's blessing on that which He had given. They stood round and eat by turns, beginning at the youngest save one, who

was an infant at the mother's breast. But when it came to M'Kenzie's turn, he shook his head, and looked away. "Nae lassie, nae, I canna eat the children's bread," he exclaimed. But now the wife would not be refused; "And what is your strength but the children's bread?" she replied, "ah, man! ye maun eat, or ye canna work; and neither bit nor sup shall pass *my* lips till ye hae eaten what's there. I've mair on the fire for the bairns, and you're wanting to be awa', for its a sair, sair bit, that ye hae to gang till your work."

"Dinna ca' it *sair*, lassie, and I'll do as ye would hae me, for oh, its mony and mony a braw Highlander that looking on a family o' hungry weans

would bless God for the like, even if the wage were less ;” and he eat up the porridge as he was bidden (there might be a matter of a tea-cup full).

Again the blessed book was read aloud ; again he led the prayer, that was prayer indeed, for it arose from a sense of actual want, and it arose in the assurance that, through the merits of the Redeemer, that want, the temporal as well as the spiritual, would be supplied. And the thought of the mercies of yesterday quickened his faith, and gave animation to his voice as he raised it in the hymn of praise : and then he “ went forth to his labour,” for that was *his* part, and he felt strong to do it.

We will not prolong our history by recording the details of days that came and went in like manner: for about three weeks the father continued to work at the embankment, returning to his family with the fruits of his labour every evening. But day by day his strength declined, and on the fifth of February, it was two hours past midnight before he returned to his anxious wife. He found her in earnest prayer, and as he stepped over the threshold, the words, "Lord, wilt Thou leave us to perish, the mother with the little ones?" fell on his ear in accents wrung from an agonized spirit. In the intenseness of her supplication she had not heard even *his* approach. Her head

which had been flung back was suddenly bent forward, her hands relaxed somewhat of the tightness of their grasp, and the anguish seemed to have passed away as she fervently and firmly added,—“ Yet not *my* will, but *Thine* be done.” It must be so indeed, for would our gracious God have bidden us “ cast our burden upon him,” unless it had been his purpose to receive it from us?*

Her eye now fell upon her husband, and a strange chill crept over her as she remarked his wild and haggard look. Yes, the plague

* “ Cast thy burden upon the Lord ;” and it may be some man shall say, How ? Roll it on him with the two hands of faith and prayer.—*Leighton*.

had begun! nature overtaken day by day, could hold out no longer; and though the spirit of the man had sustained his infirmities, his strength had failed at last. For some days he had been struggling with low fever, but he felt that he could struggle no more, and that the hand of death was upon him. He looked round upon his wife and children, but he remembered who had said,—“Leave thy fatherless children to Me, and let thy widows trust in Me;” and he felt that in exchanging the weak ministry of his unnerved arm for the strength of the “everlasting arms,” there was no room for lamentation.

He tried to read the chapter as usual, but his sight failed, and he

lay back upon the clay floor, and never rose from it again. The fever rapidly assumed the worst form of typhus, and ere the third day closed in, Margaret M'Kenzie was a widow indeed, and desolate. We will not linger over details too painful to be needlessly dwelt upon; we will not unveil a sorrow too sacred to be exposed and dissected; but we must observe, that there is one feature in the Highland character which exercised a painful influence on the poor family in this their hour of deepest affliction. From the rareness among them of such visitations, any disorder of a contagious or epidemic kind is regarded by the Highlanders with such a degree of horror as leads them to shrink from

any offices involving contact with the sufferers, and thus there was none to help; and oh, who but those who have known what it is to feel the *loneliness* of sorrow, can realize the strong consolation that the M'Kenzies found in the assurance of the sympathy of Christ; and in the remembrance that of him in his sufferings, it is written,—“Of the people there was none with me?”

The elder boy had been sent to the nearest place to procure a coffin, and to promise the cow in payment,—it was their only remaining possession, except the heather mattress, and *that* none would take, from dread of the fever,—and Margaret's wedding gown, which her husband

had tried to exchange for money or for food ; but no one had either to give for it.

When the carpenter heard the boy's name, he shrunk back, and bade him be gone, in a voice in which terror predominated over sympathy.

In due time, however, the coffin was brought to the door, and there deposited ; and of the few clansmen who attended to bear their kinsman to the grave, not one would enter the dwelling to assist in moving the remains of him to whom living or dying, under any other circumstances, they would have refused nothing. Poor Margaret ! that *was* a trial ! but not greater than the promise,—
“ 4s thy day, so shall thy strength

be." It was indeed a dark, dark day; but the promise *could* not be hidden, even though it was a darkness to be *felt*. *How* it was accomplished, the poor widow knew not. The first-born had helped, and fallen panting at the threshold, fainting with exertion and with horror; and when the door was opened, those without drew back, and bade her, though in tones of solemn pity, lay her burden in its narrow bed herself; and then they signed to her to retire. She closed the door behind her, and in a few minutes they drew round the coffin, closed, and bore it to the boat, and rowed in silence to the island resting-place of the M'Kenzies, in the middle of the lake.

There is something peculiarly solemn in standing on an island of graves. The very dust that the summer breeze wafts over us, may indeed remind us of our mortality,—suggest a thought that it, perhaps, was once animated: but the complete isolation of such a spot as this, fixes the mind to the contemplation, as though thought for once were fettered, and the subject of her meditations were bound upon her, like the wave upon that sepulchral shore,—and so it was felt by all now, and not a word was spoken as they laid M'Kenzie in his long home.

But we must return to the cabin where the roof-tree had thus fallen in its prime, and where yet, through

faith and hope that is in Christ Jesus, the widow was enabled, amid the desolation of all things earthly, still to bear up, and amid her first tears, to thank God that her husband had departed in peace. The delirium had ceased about an hour before his death, and he had bade his Margaret remember that, though while spared to his family they had a right to look to him for support, yet he had been but the instrument, in God's hands, for providing it; and that now he was taken from them, God would be sure to supply their necessities through some other channel, rather than be wanting to his promise of being a "husband to the widow, and a father to the fatherless." He bade her read him the

eighth chapter of Romans, "that blessed chapter," he said, "which begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation." When she came to the words "killed all the day long—accounted as sheep for the slaughter," he fixed his eyes upon her; and as she read on, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us," he repeated after her "more than conquerors through Him," "*more* than conquerors." And as she read further, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God

which is in Christ Jesus," he bowed his head as if in experimental assent, and his spirit departed to God who gave it.

Such had been M'Kenzie's end ; and his widow as she thought of his freed spirit rejoicing before the Throne and with the Lamb, was comforted, and found peace in the expectation of the time when she and his little ones should also be summoned to that land where " they neither hunger nor thirst any more."

That night she read the latter part of the seventh chapter of the Revelation with her children ; and as she told how their father was now among this " great multitude," little Moggie cried, and asked as she shivered with the cold, why

they might not go to him ; for “ O mither, though ye hae read that there’s nae heat there, onie mair than here, yet gin there’s nae hunger, it wadna be sae sair to bear.”

The tears fell fast from Margaret’s eyes, the first tears she had shed, as she took the child upon her knee, and told her that none could enter that land, but those whom God was pleased to call there, and that till he gave the summons we must patiently abide here, suffering his will, and enduring unto the end whatever he sees fit. “ And oh, Moggie, lass,” she added, “ ye ken I bless God ye hae aye kennit, since ye were auld enoo’ to understand, ‘ that our Heavenly Father so loved the world that he gave his only

Son to die for us ;' 'and now shall he not with him also freely give us *all* things?' And as he gives hunger and cold to us now, it's because they're best for us, for he *could* give food and firing just as easily. And oh, my dear bairns, doesna' it soften your pangs to think that your Father in Heaven sends them?"

Moggie put her arm round her mother's neck and nodded assent and tried to smile, but the shivering that had seized her was the beginning of the fever, and she too drooped and died. Margaret told her that the summons *had* now come for her, and she asked her if she would like to go to the Lord Jesus, the good shepherd who had said, "Suffer the little children to come to

me?" "The child could not speak, but she stretched her arms upward, and ere they fell again at her side, she knew what it was to be gathered among the lambs of the heavenly pasture; she knew (oh, may we all one day know too), *what it is to* "be with Jesus."

The little stock of meal that the clansmen had brought with them on the day of M'Kenzie's funeral, was now exhausted; the cow had ceased to yield any milk, and would have been killed for food; but none had strength to deal the fatal blow. The extremity of destitution had now come upon the bereaved family. The poor infant sought in vain for the nourishment that was no longer supplied, and cried and

mourned upon its mother's knees. The two elder boys were down with the fever, but they struggled hard with it, *their* summons was not sounded yet.

And do you ask *how* Margaret and her children were supported? she shall answer for herself. "We lived upon the promises of God's Word, and when they seemed to tarry, we just read the fourth of Philippians, and so were enabled to wait, though they tarry, through Christ that strengtheneth us in the spirit."

Oh, the blessings of a *Bible* education; if those who undervalue, or would substitute something else in its stead, could just contrast the peace of a Highland family, with

the despair of an Irish cabin, where the Scriptures are unknown, and the way of salvation is hidden from their eyes; they would surely be content to give the Scriptures, at all events, to those to whom they can secure no earthly good beside. And may those who *have* the Scriptures and have *with* them the good things of this life, learn to prize them the more highly, when they see those who have received them into their hearts and minds, "thankful and contented amid the horrors of starvation."*

But we digress,—two days had come and gone without food of any kind, and as she had no breakfast

* From a letter by the wife of a Clergyman in Argyleshire, dated March 25, 1847.

•

to give them, Margaret had let her children sleep late in the morning; and when, ere she lay down at night by their side, she had looked on their pale wan faces, the skin prematurely shrivelled and wrinkled, the bones projecting in place of the dimpled roundness of childhood, she felt that their hours must be numbered, and often instead of sleeping, she rose and put her ear close to each, that she might be sure they still breathed. And she shrunk overpowered from the thought of passing another night thus; and then the weary day that followed—deserted by all, not a living thing came near the dwelling. Still strong in faith, Margaret cheered her remaining little ones till evening came, and

they asked her to pray that they might go to their father and Moggie. She asked if they would leave her then alone? they said she should ask to go too. And then the second girl Jeanie asked why, if God heard prayer, he had not heard theirs and given them bread? It is written, "He giveth not account of any of his matters," said the mother solemnly. "It is written, too, 'He doth not *willingly* afflict the children of men,' and (in pity to the weakness of our faith, and as if to meet the very cravings of our questioning), it is most graciously written also, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou *shalt* know hereafter.'" This was said, as is generally the case with the Scotch in speaking

directly of Scripture, in the pure English of the authorized version; it was also said, in a tone of rebuke, for perhaps nothing could have excited her feelings so deeply as the idea of unbelief of God's Word, or distrust of God's love in any of her children. It was as though the enemy had found entrance; as though the wolf, seeking whom he might devour, had got into her little fold. She took the child on her knee, "Jeanie, lass," she said, "It is nae sae lang syne that you should forget the day your father corrected ye and kept you withouten yer parritch for dinner or supper, because ye'd displeased and disobeyed him; and did ye think *then* either that he *could na'* have bidden me gie ye the parritch;

or that he had *næ* gude reason for not bidding me. Ye thinkit *næ* siccan a thing, Jeanie, and ye maun ken that your Heavenly Father has a right to chasten ye, as well as your earthly, and ye maun *feel* as well as *ken* that he does it for your profit." The little girl leant her head against her mother's shoulder and wept; and Margaret kissed her, and continued soothingly,—“I dinna expect ye to find it pleasant, lass, ‘for no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous.’ And this is grievous above measure, in especial for weans like ye; but remember we ‘do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.’ And pray, pray to him to

forgive you the thought of your heart, and to make you 'trust him, though you canna trace him;' he says, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' You saw that he was with your father and Moggie, yet they died, but He was with them as the life of their spirit, and now they are with Him for ever." The child, soothed by her voice and warmed by her embrace, ere long fell asleep in her arms; and thus Margaret passed the dreaded night. She would not move for fear of breaking the deep, sound sleep; but the presence of her God was with her, and none of the terrors of darkness were suffered to approach her.

The morning dawn showed Mar-

garet her other children stretched on their mattress as usual; but the grey cat, their constant companion had disappeared. Stiff and weary, the mother laid herself down by them and fell asleep; and the day was far advanced when she again opened her eyes on the scene of so much suffering. The fever had not attacked the others; and the boys who had had it, were recovering, though so weak that without nourishment as they were, it was plain they could not long survive. The baby seldom unclosed its eyes, it lay and slumbered either on its mother's lap, or on a bundle of rags in a corner of the room. The rest had become too weak to cry, too faint to talk, and except when the chap-

ter was read, and the prayer arose, or when Margaret repeated aloud some promise from God's Word to support the hearts of her little ones, silence reigned in the cottage. Exhaustion produced drowsiness, and quieted the pangs of hunger. The hope of procuring food had almost deserted her; the only dwelling within two miles, was a solitary cabin, whose tenants were little likely to be better provided than herself; and Margaret felt that she had now only to wait in patience, till He who hath the keys of death, should open the portals of the shadowy valley and lead them all through it, to the mansions prepared for them above. Her own strength was wonderful; it could

not be natural strength, for that had been drained by her infant, and by long abstinence and painful watching; it was the strength of woman's devotedness, upheld by faith in the Word of God.

She led the morning worship as usual, and she prayed in calm resignation that she might be enabled to submit her will with cheerfulness to the will of God; and she praised the loving Saviour for his gracious assurance, in his invitation to the little children, that he would receive them. To Him in death, as she believed, she now committed them; but the thought, that she had not yet fully done *her* part, sunk upon her conscience; and giving the baby into the charge of

the elder ones, she bade them pray that God would guide her way while she went in search of food to keep them all alive. But she had overtaken her powers, and as she met the current of fresh, cold air, her head swam, her steps tottered, and she fell as she crossed the threshold. And it was a shriek of ecstasy such as she little thought her famishing bairns could have raised, such as for many a day, many a week had never fallen on her ears that roused her again to consciousness. She rose, and supporting herself by the wall, re-entered the room. And oh, what a sight met her eyes, there was the grey cat with a large fish in its mouth upon the children's bed. He who had

formerly fed his prophet by the ravens, had now in this affecting providence shown his care of them.* The fish was brought as one of the boys suggested, from an old *yare*, or fish trap at the head of the lake. Hunger had overcome the instinctive dislike of the cat to water, and the instinct which leads the species to play with its prey before despatching it, had thus been overruled for the sustenance of his people, by him „ who ordereth *all* things.”

The cat dropped the fish between the children, and purring and rubbing herself against them, jumped down, and made her way through the opened door. She returned with a second supply, and for three

* Letter from Dr. Aldcorn.

days the family were kept alive in this manner. If Margaret's faith had been firm and unwavering before, we need not wonder that now all care for the future seemed taken from her heart. God had begun to restore, he would not mock her hopes; and the desire of life and the thought of better, no not better (for never had she lived so near her God), but brighter days revived. It was at this time that the deputation from the Destitution Committee arrived in Argyleshire. They visited the glen, and awarded to Margaret, in common with about 120 of the most destitute families, an allowance of meal, sufficient for the support of herself and her family for six weeks.

And now we would, ere we part, say a few last words to the reader. Have you as you read felt moved by the tale of suffering, such as perhaps you never even imagined before? Then if you have, let the feeling *work*; for it has been well said, "When such relations in real life are listened to, without any efforts for the relief of the sufferer, the emotion is gradually weakened;" and that moral condition, "so abhorrent to our fellow creatures, so alien from the Divine Nature, is produced, which we call selfishness and hardness of heart." And we might appeal even to this very selfishness; for that which is the case of our brethren now, may ere long be our own. We trust that through the sparing mercy

of our God, and his blessing on our harvests, sought by our humiliation through the merits of the Redeemer, it may be averted from us. But "*as*" in such a case, *should* it ever be your own, "ye would that men should do unto you, *even so* do unto them." "To-day harden not your hearts."

The Highlander too has a peculiar claim on our bounty, for he has ever been ready to minister to the wants of the stranger and the traveller. During a tour of some weeks among the mountains and the glens, we very frequently closed an evening ramble by a visit to their cottages. And never in one single instance, though we were a party of five, were

we allowed to depart without partaking of their hospitality; nor would they receive remuneration in return. Their hospitality they can no longer offer, their meal chest is empty, their cow has long been gone, and is it not the time for us to render back what we so freely received? But they have a *higher* claim. It is written,—“Do good unto all men, *specially unto them that are of the household of faith,*” and such are they.

“And oh, may we all have grace so to deny ourselves that we may be enabled to follow the example of His compassion, Who, ‘though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor.’
 • And Who, though content for our

sakes to endure himself the pinching pains of hunger and want, yet suffered not the multitudes to go hungry away."



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